



MEDIA RELEASE

St John Eye Hospital Icon comes to Sydney

Celebrating 125 years of the St John Jerusalem Eye Hospital

To celebrate the 125th anniversary of the St John Jerusalem Eye Hospital, on Sunday 13 September The Lord Vestey DL, Chairman of the Hospital, will bring the St John Jerusalem Eye Hospital Icon to Sydney as part of a year-long fundraising journey across the world.

Beginning in January this year at St John's Gate, London, the journey aims to raise money for The International Patient Relief Appeal with a target of \$2.5 million. This Appeal will help with the cost of treatment at the Eye Hospital for those who can not afford to pay.

The majority of St John Jerusalem Eye Hospital patients come from the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, where access to specialist healthcare is limited. Eye disease causing blindness is ten times more common in this region than in developed countries. St John treats over 65,000 patients every year.

Before it started its fundraising journey, the St John Jerusalem Eye Hospital Icon was taken from Jerusalem, through Acre and Malta, to London. This was a journey to revisit some sites where the hospitaling tradition of the Order of St John was established.

The Icon has already been welcomed in countries including South Africa, Wales and Hong Kong and will continue on to New Zealand and the USA. It has been carved out of Jerusalem stone, which is symbolic both of the Hospital's charitable works and is a call for aid.

Sean Gavin, CEO of St John (NSW), comments:

"We are very pleased to have the Icon here in Sydney and hope it brings awareness not only of the St John Jerusalem Eye Hospital and the work that is done there but also of the eye care work St John does in Australia.

"The St John (NSW) Pius X Eye Clinic in Moree was established in 2006 to address the high incidence of eye disease in the rural and remote communities of New South Wales, particularly among the Aboriginal population.

"Through this and other such projects, St John (NSW) is helping to provide extensive ophthalmic services for less fortunate communities."

The Lord Vestey will present the Icon to Sydney at a fundraising gathering on Sunday 13 September at the Officers Mess of Victoria Barracks, Paddington. He will then travel with the Icon to Melbourne.

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For more information, images and to attend the event, please contact:

Bethany Hoskin

Communications Coordinator

St John (NSW)

P: 02 9219 6856

E: bethany_hoskin@stjohnnsw.com.au

Notes to editors:

About The Lord Vestey DL

The Lord Vestey was Chancellor of the Venerable Order of St John of Jerusalem 1988-1991 and was made Lord Prior 1991-2002. He has been Master of the Horse, of the Royal Household, of the Sovereign of the United Kingdom since 1999.

About The St John Eye Hospital, Jerusalem

Founded in 1882, the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital is one of the two Foundations of The Order of St John, St John Ambulance being the second. It is the sole provider of charitable medical eye care for the people in Jerusalem. The mission of the Hospital has continued across the turbulent years and, true to the spirit of St. John, their doors remain open to all, regardless of race, creed or ability to pay.

The main Hospital in East Jerusalem has a 49 bed capacity and is staffed by foreign and local specialist surgeons, doctors and nurses. There is a large modern outpatient department, and very busy specialist retinal, corneal and paediatric units and operating theatres. A 24 hour emergency service is provided.

Static clinics have been established in Gaza, Hebron and Anabta, not only bringing first class ophthalmic services to these areas but also providing much needed employment to the local population. Two mobile units visit the West Bank towns and villages, one conducting general ophthalmic clinics and the other specialising in the treatment of diabetic retinopathy.

It is a sad fact that eye disease is ten times more likely to occur in this region than in developed countries. Eye disease is especially prevalent in children. 30% of the population is under the age of 10. 80% of blindness is preventable 65,000 patients per year are treated by St John staff.

About NSW Ophthalmic Care Projects

Through the initiative of Prof Frank Bilson, St John (NSW) has provided eye screening equipment for the Aboriginal Medical Service in West Dubbo. The Thubbo Project resulted in the purchase of equipment designed to screen for diabetes, macular degeneration, cataract, glaucoma and other conditions which could lead to preventable blindness.

In 2006 an equally new and exciting development in NSW Eye Care has occurred via the establishment and equipping of the *Pius X St John Eye Clinic* in Moree. To date Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (ATSIH) and NSW Health have contributed significant sums to establish the program. St John (NSW) has raised other funds for the purchase of "state-of-the-art" diagnostic and laser treatment equipment for the Clinic.

The Clinic began seeing patients in October 2006 and there have now been nine operating lists and more than 75 operations conducted, primarily cataract surgery. This has been the first significant eye surgery conducted in the region in many years.

The future equipment need for the clinic is a fully equipped mobile eye bus to enable the health team to visit isolated communities, diagnose and where required transport indigenous people to Moree for surgery. St John (NSW) is holding a fundraising dinner in November to raise money to purchase this bus.